Historical Information about the Pittsfield Massachusetts Almshouse from the 1898 Municipal Report

My ancestors first came to Pittsfield in ~1850 and that has lead to much “research” into their lives and has revealed many interesting facts about Pittsfield’s past.
Clark W. Nicholls

1908 post card “Pittsfield in the near Future"
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Almshouse 1898

CITY ALMSHOUSE 1897

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REPORT OF THE OVERSEERS OF THE POOR.
To His Honor, the Mayor, and the City Council of the City of Pittsfield.

The seventh annual report of the Overseers of the Poor ending Dec. 31, 1897, with the annexed tables is herewith respectfully submitted. The expense of caring for the poor during the past year has been very much larger than any previous year since the organization of the City Government. There has been an unusual number of "out of work cases" aided who have never required relief before. A number of cases where the husbands and fathers have deserted their families, and in some cases have been sent to jail for failing to support their families on account of the drink habit. There were a number of cases of Diphtheria where the families, who were quarantined to prevent the spread of the disease, were entirely dependent on the City for support until the quarantine was removed. There was one case of Typhoid Fever, the family residing in the City of North Adams, who was settled in this City, which was an expensive case. Widows with large families of small children have been aided and will require aid until some of the children become self supporting and are able to render assistance in support of the family.

There is an increase in the cost of supporting the poor in the same ratio as our population increases in numbers. Since our last annual report the barns at the Almshouse have been completed, a much needed addition has been made to the tool house and a vault for the outdoor water closets, the cess pool cleaned. The line fences in most cases have been made of wire. The buildings and fences are in good repair except a part of the house which will have to be re-shingled. In making these improvements we were obliged to overrun the first appropriation. We believe now that there will not be an extraordinary expense at the Almshouse for some time to come. Everything for the comfort and safety of the inmates has been done It is with pleasure we read from the annual report of the State Board of Lunacy and Charity the following in regard to our Almshouse. "Pittsfield (visited October 25, 1897). This Almshouse has a pleasant situation and in the main is well arranged. There is a separate building for the insane, who have good care. The house presents a generally improved appearance over shat of last year. The discipline and order are good. There is provision for complete separation of the sexes. A new barn is completed, and the whole plant is now a very satisfactory one"

We have expended on outdoor poor account, $12,443.16
Credit from state, cities and towns and other sources, 2,977.22
Net expense to the City, $9,465.94
Total expense at the Almshouse was $5,999.13
Credits for board, 410.08
Net expense to the City, $5,589.05
JOHN W. CLARK, WILLIAM NUGENT, Overseers of the Poor.

The total number of families aided outside of the Almshouse was 242, of 1190 persons, of which number 143 families of 480 persons, (214 males, 272 females, 218 of that number were children under 16 years of age) were settled and living in this City. Ten families of 46 persons (24 males, 22 females, and 26 of that number were children under

16 years of age) the wives and children were settled, but the husbands and fathers did not have any settlement in this Commonwealth. Thirty-six families of 113 persons (48 males, 65 females, 49 were children under 16 years of age) having settlements in some other cities or towns. Fifty-three families of 145 persons (72 males, 73 females, 59 of which were children under 16 years of age) having no legal settlement in Massachusetts. There has been at the different institution for the insane, during some part of the year, 18 persons. Seven have been there the whole year, and 10 remaining there Dec. 31. The total expense of three has been reimbursed to the City Treasury. The expense of one has been paid in part. There have been seven children at the St. Vincent Mountain Home for Children, three remaining Dec. 31. One-half the expense was paid by the City. There has been one girl at the Hospital Cottages for Children at Baldwinsville part of the year, but was discharged Sept. 20. Two children have been legally adopted in good families and two boys have been placed in the New England Home for Little Wanderers.

FINANCE ACCOUNT OF ALMSHOUSE.
By amount appropriated by the City Council, $6,000.00
Disbursed as follows, to wit, Food Supplies, $762.40
Meat, Fish, etc., 328.87
Feed, 262.00
Clothing, 96.49
Shoes, 87.25
Dry Goods, 178.58
House Goods and Furniture, 177.06

REPORT OF THE CITY PHYSICIAN.
To His Honor, The Mayor, and the Honorable City Council:
Gentlemen: In this institution there was nothing especially new to direct attention. The management has been the very best, and strict supervision has been carried out with care and judgment in all the departments. I have been informed by Superintendent Shaw that the water supply has been fairly good during last summer, except for about two weeks, when a scarcity was keenly felt, due, however, to faults that cannot be gotten rid of under the present system. Perhaps more security might be had in this very important matter if a couple more water tanks were built in connection with the ones now in use. These tanks would serve for a kind of storage reservoir with perhaps sufficient capacity to supply this much needed want for a number of -days; it would also do away with all trouble and annoyance, whenever there existed a scarcity of water in the spring or the absence of power to propel the windmill. PAUPERISM. We have thought that a few suggestive hints about this class of our population, would be in order at this time, when we take into consideration the large number of unemployed men who were compelled to seek aid and relief during last winter and spring, having been driven to it, we are led to believe, by sheer want. I made inquiry of William Dimick, Superintendent of the Poor Department, to ascertain how many men with families had sought aid. His reply was, after a careful examination of his books, that fifty men, fathers of families, had made application for help, and that the whole number of persons comprising these families was two hundred and eight. We are led to suppose, however, that many of these men who made application to Mr. Dimick for aid must have been from among that class of persons who had been

earning fair wages in the various manufacturing and industrial establishments of our city, but who, from want of foresight and knowledge to perceive the calamitous condition of the times, had made no adequate provisions for their homes. This is one of the saddest things to observe among our class of wage earners, that when prosperity smiles on them with full and plenty, they rarely or never bestow a thought upon the future dangers, that the depression of business may bring in its wake, and seldom or ever lay up anything for the "rainy day." If then, there is any one thing that discourages a man who is honest, honorable and upright, and who has been supporting his family by his daily labor, it is to be deprived of that means of employment. and have himself degraded and classed as a pauper. Besides we know that the most fruitful source of petty crimes among the unemployed, proceeds from idleness, and that any means that could be devised with which to remove this cause, would contribute greatly toward restoring a higher moral standard among them. This class should be encouraged, and if possible, instructed by our dispensers of charity, to save a little from their wages and put it in some of the in institutions for savings which have been purposely established by law for the benefit of such people. Then, when a friend was needed, they would have a friend indeed. There is nothing, however, under this inverted bowl called the sky, that contributes so much to the real contentment, comfort and happiness of our industrial classes, as steady and constant employment. There were plenty of men last winter who were ready and willing to do any kind of work, by which they could earn enough of money to support themselves and their little ones, but who could get no work to do. We must acknowledge that we have a large indigent class to take care of, even in our most prosperous times, who, by bodily infirmities are so afflicted, that it is essential to provide them with the necessaries of life in our pauper institutions. For those, the laws of the State and City make ample provision. This class includes the orphans, maimed, aged and the insane. Those are, therefore, our legitimate poor. In looking over the last City Report for 1896-7, we find that about twenty-one thousand dollars were appropriated and expended for the poor and helpless. I learned, also, that the two charitable societies in the City here, spent about five thousand dollars in rendering aid and assistance to poor families. I found again on inquiry that our merchants annually give to the unemployed about eight thousand dollars, with the only security for it, "I will pay you when the times are good." After a somewhat cursory review, we find that the amount of money expended last year from all sources for the purpose of aiding the poor, amounted in the aggregate to about forty thousand dollars. A specific amount of this came by appropriation directly from the taxes; another portion was received from the contributions of our charitably disposed people, and still another goodly sized sum was donated by our merchants. By this, it will be readily perceived that we have been to some extent supporting unconsciously a number pi able bodied men in idleness, although it is to be presumed, that the majority of those who received aid last winter, were absolutely in need of assistance. Just consider the matter. We have had just as many able bodied men apply for City aid, as we have in mates in all the departments of our City Almshouse, including both sexes. What we should particularly endeavor to do, is to assist and encourage those charitable societies who are doing so much to prevent pauperism, because it is only through those channels that the poor and worthy families can be justly aided. The superintendents of these charities are painstaking in investigating every case, and know, therefore, when, where and how to administer help. In discussing this matter with many of the business people of the city, the consensus of opinion seemed

to be, that if money had to be appropriated from the taxes for the support of the unemployed, it might possibly be used to better advantage by establishing some sort of public works. This they think would be the most just and economical way of disposing of our idle men. By giving them employment it would enable them to pay their lawful debts, it would keep them out of evil ways and it would arouse within them the true spirit of citizenship. We believe that the carrying out of some such suggestion would aid very materially toward curing pauperism. The following represents in tabular form the doings of this office for the year ending December 31st, 1897.

REPORT OF THE Superintendent of Almshouse.
To the Honorable Board, the Overseers of the Poor :
List of names, time of support and expense per week:
— Weeks, Days
1 Brundage, Sarah, insane, 52
2 Barnfather, Wm., insane, 52
3 Crane, Nelson, sane, 52
5 Campbell, Mary, insane, 52
7 Cunningham, Isaac, insane, 52
8 Buckley, Timothy, insane, 52
9 Dunn, Patrick, insane, 52
11 Goodrick, Bradford, sane 52
13 Hoffman, Agnes, insane, 52
14 Klingly, John, sane, 52
17 Messick, Maggie, insane, 52
18 Mara, Thomas, insane, 52
20 Reid, John, insane, 52
21 Suttle, John, insane, 52
22 Swallow, John, insane , 11
23 Toohey, Lawrence, sane, 52
24 Moss, John, weak minded, 52
26 Jones, Cinderella, sane. 20
27 Farrell, James, insane, 47
29 Fobricius, James, weak minded, 52
30 Myres, Carrie, sane, 52
31 Carr, Daisy, insane, 52
36 Graves, Walter, weak minded, 52
42 Conley, Patrick, sane,
60 Barry, John, sane, 26 6
65 Martin, Sarah, sane, 52 1
67 Daniels, James, weak minded, 43 1
70 Lorange, Fred, sane, 36 5
72 Frederick, Jacob, sane, 52 1
76 Grant, Justus, sane. 42 0
79 Reynolds, Samuel, sane, 52 1
81 Daniels, Peter, sane. 7 2
84 Winchell, Pearl, weak minded, 47 1

86 Hogan, Maggie, insane, 2 3
87 Desmond, Timothy, insane, 18 5
93 Bagg, Charles, weak minded, 52 1
95 Bouchat, Susan, sane, 47 1
96 Whalen, Patrick, sane, 13 4
32 Tatro, Lewis, sane, 52 1
102 Brien, Michael, insane, 52 1
183 Saunders, Willie, sane, 52 1
105 Hill, Annie, sane, 11 6
106 Crocker, Henry, insane, 44 4
187 Doyle, E. J., sane, 14 4
108 Winchell, Minerva, sane, 52 1
109 Hadd, Joseph, sane, 52 1
110 Hill, Irene, sane, 11 1
35 Church, Rosella, sane, 1 4
38 Church, Arthur, sane, 1 4
112 Walker, David, sane, 0 5
113 Dombuskie, Agnes, sane, 45 1
114 Joseph, Mary, sane, 1 3
115 Butterly, Maria, insane, 33 3
117 Burbank, James, insane, 0 5
118 McCormick, Patrick, sane, 11 0
119 King, John, sane, 0 3
120 Clary, John, sane, 0 3
121 Watson, James, sane, 0 0
122 Saddler, Walter, sane, 2 4
123 Crocker, Cora, sane, 35 4
124 Warner, Cloe, sane, 34 2
125 Murphy, Ellen, sane, 33 0
126 Collins, Garrett, sane, 32 4
94 Coy, Margaret, insane, 32 1
127 Morrow, George, insane, 2 2
128 Rhoen, Jeremiah, sane, 27 5
129 Whal, Jacob, sane, 27 1
130 Hubby, Edward, sane, 14 3
131 Crocker, Martha, sane, 26 2
132 Crocker, Albert, sane, 14 4
133 McDaniels, Daniel, sane, 22 1
134 Billings, Gilbert, sane, 13 3
135 Billings, Charlie, sane, 13 3
37 Price, David, sane, 21 6
56 Callahan, Timothy, sane, 4 2
136 Murphy, Katie, 0 4
137 Lang, Freddie, 2 3
138 Shannahan, Michael, insane, 5 1
139 Larson, Olof, insane, 0 4

140 Featherstone, Mary, insane, 12 3
141 Sullivan, Jeffrey, sane, 4 5
142 McDermot, Thomas, sane, 3 3
143 Lobdell, Mary Ann, insane, 2 4
144 Walker, William, sane, 1 3
145 Hartley, Patrick, sane, 1 2
146 Jackson, Ellen, sane, 1 1
Appropriation, $6,000.00
Expenses, $5,999.13
Cost per head, per week, $226.09

We wish to call your attention to the dealings of the past year at the City Farm. While some of the crops were not up to those of last year, on the whole they were very good. There has been eight cows bought and added to our stock, making sixteen milch cows now on the farm. Stock, fencing, storage shed, cleaning large cesspool on home farm, phosphate for Burbank Park, amounts to nearly $500, this taken from our appropriation makes our expenses per week: very low. Our help numbers four, C. A. Kilmer and Miss Durfee, helpers among inmates and insane; one girl in kitchen; and James Conlin, night watchman. We feel that Dr. Mercer has treated our sick with the very best of medical skill. There has been six deaths the past year.
James Burbank, died Feb. 27.
John Swallow, died March 22.
Rhoda Bosket, died May 18.
Edward Hubby, died Oct. 7.
Susan Pouchant, died Nov. 26.
James Farrell, died Nov. 28.
There are 52 inmates on books Dec. 31. Feb. and Sept. each numbered, 57; June, 48. Thirty-one supported the whole year, 60 part of the year, and 91 in all. Sixty-one males, 30 females; 33 of these are insane and idiotic; 4 women and 1 man are entirely helpless. We are thankful to the Board and Mr. Dimick for past favors- and kindness to us.
Respectfully submitted,
MB. WILLIAM SHAW, Superintendent.
MRS. WILLIAM SHAW, Matron.
Pittsfield, Mass., Jan. 24, 1898.

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